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SUBJECT: LEBANON: SINIORA CALLS FOR "CONVIVENCIA"

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) In a meeting with the House Democracy Assistance Commission (HDAC), Prime Minister Siniora shared his own understanding of the Lebanese will to live with one another. He insisted that Lebanon must exert sovereignty over its own lands, which in his definition include Sheb'a Farms. Recovery of this land would also eliminate a barrier to disarming Hizballah. In regard to the crisis in the north, Siniora said he is not negotiating with Fatah al-Islam, but is talking with the Palestinians, who in turn talk to the extremists. This is a battle between Lebanon and terrorists; not a battle with Palestinians, Siniora asserted. General Aoun may want to come over to the majority, but might not be able to, since he single-mindedly wants the presidency. Meanwhile, Aoun is reaping the fruits of the "misbehavior of Hassan Nasrallah." End Summary.

"CONVIVENCIA"

2. (C) Prime Minister Fouad Siniora met on May 29 with members of the House Democracy Assistance Commission. The Ambassador, Econoff, and staff aids accompanied the delegation. Siniora was joined by his Chief of Protocol Ambassador Ramez Dimashkieh and staff aide Rola Nouredine. Siniora thanked the congressional members for the inflow of support and ammunition for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), saying that the nature and intensity of the challenges facing Lebanon today are enormous. These challenges are all effectively directed at what Lebanon represents: democracy, openness, tolerance, moderation and acceptance. To illustrate the core ethic of Lebanon Siniora resorted to an old Spanish word, dating back to the time when the Arabs and the Spanish lived together. he defined this as "convivencia" or "living together." Lebanese, when faced with a challenge, are still convinced that there isn't a better model for their country.

ASSASSINATIONS, TRIBUNALS  
AND IMPUNITY

3. (C) Siniora described Lebanon as a country of "impunity," echoing a statement made by MP Saad Hariri to the delegation the previous day. Referring to the many assassinations in Lebanon over recent years, Siniora said that, never knowing who or why or how, there is no way to stop them or to protect democracy without the international tribunal. During the

rounds of discussion in the national dialogue a year ago, the question of the tribunal was passed on the first round. So how can it be, Siniora asked, that the opposition now says that the tribunal is a U.S. plot? Siniora pointed out that there were efforts to stop the assassinations and to protect democracy through other methods, but to the surprise of all, Speaker Berri "took sides" and "closed the house (Parliament) and opened the streets." He believed that Berri pre-empted the Parliament. For those reasons, Siniora felt compelled to write to the UN to request the establishment of the tribunal under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

#### SOVEREIGNTY OVER ITS OWN LANDS

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13. (C) Siniora then took up the question of Sheb'a Farms, saying that Lebanon needs sovereignty over "all" of its lands, which he made clear includes, in his mind, Sheba'a Farms. Although the UN up until now has considered Sheb'a Farms to be Syrian, it believes that Israel should withdraw. However, now the UN is about to issue a ruling that will probably say that the Sheb'a Farms belong to Lebanon. Although the land is not strategically important, the re-possession of it would take away a strong argument jthat Hizballah uses to justify the retention of its arms. Because the army and security are the most important tools of a state, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) need a monopoly over the use of force. Until Hizballah disarms this will not be possible. It was only recently that the LAF was able to deploy to the south, after an absence of 35 years.

#### BATTLE WITH FATAH AL-ISLAM

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14. (C) Siniora pointed out that Fatah al-Islam, which he said "borrowed its name," is aggressive and began the recent attacks in the North even before the LAF reached the Fatah al-Islam leased apartments. (Note: The apartments were safe houses for Fatah al-Islam members who were suspected of robbing banks. End Note.) Siniora said that Fatah al-Islam has been "hijacking" the Palestinian camps. This is not a war with the Palestinians, he insisted, but a war between Lebanon and terrorists. He would like it if Fatah al-Islam were to surrender, but a battle is preferable to continued terror. He understands that the Palestinians want to protect themselves, but there are now too many groups. The aggression of Fatah al-Islam reveals a failure of the Palestinians to self-police, and now there are armed groups outside of the camps. The government is not negotiating with Fatah al-Islam itself, but talking with Hamas and Fatah; they in turn talk to Fatah al-Islam. When asked about the details of the fighting, Siniora laughingly replied, "I'm not General Montgomery." However, he did say that they are studying and assessing all possible outcomes, and working with the Palestinians against the extremists. He also pointed out that the original Cairo agreement, calling for the government to stay out of the camps, was cancelled in 1984 and not renewed; now the agreement is unwritten only.

#### GENERAL AOUN

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15. (C) Siniora felt that FPM leader General Michel Aoun is extremely embarrassed by the constant aggression of his ally, Hizballah. Siniora described Aoun as "picking the fruits of the misbehavior of Hassan Nasrallah." The first of those fruits was the disastrous results of the election by the doctors' syndicate, in which 60-70% of the Christians sided with the March 14 bloc rather than Aoun's FPM. Siniora acknowledged the possibility of a change in Aoun's alliances, but said that he doesn't know how much change is possible, given Aoun's obsession to be president. Of that, Siniora would only say, "Lahoud is crazy, but not that crazy!"

¶6. (U) The House Democracy Assistance Commission has not cleared this cable.  
FELTMAN